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**Dramatic
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Loving

By

PETER MANOS

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PETER MANOS

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(LOVING)

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Loving

CHARACTERS

MILDRED: African-American woman

RICHARD: White man

BROTHER: African-American man

NARRATOR: Either gender, no specific ethnicity

COHEN: White man

PRODUCTION NOTES

NARRATOR and COHEN could be played by the same person, man or woman.

The songs performed by BROTHER throughout are suggestions. They are all folk songs in the public domain and provide a visceral counterpoint to the narrative. A musician or chorus could be added to sing the songs instead of BROTHER.

The music for these folk songs and a study guide can be found in the back of the book.

Loving

(In the semi-darkness they stand side by side. MILDRED, a slender woman, almost angular; and RICHARD, a man, tall, beefy and thick.)

MILDRED. He used to take care of me. He was my support.
He was my rock.

RICHARD. Just tell 'em I love my wife.

(Lights come up to reveal that MILDRED is a woman of African-American descent and RICHARD is white with a blond crew cut. She wears a simple print dress, he a work shirt and jeans. MILDRED's BROTHER, an African-American, plays his guitar and sings on the other side of the stage. His music is Virginia folk songs, mostly, shared by blacks and whites over the centuries.)

(#1: "East Virginia")

BROTHER.

I WAS BORN IN EAST VIRGINIA
CAROLINE COUNTY IS MY HOME
THERE I MET A PURE PRETTY MAIDEN
AND I LONG TO MAKE HER MY OWN

MILDRED. They called me "bean" when I was young 'cause
I was a skinny bean pole.

RICHARD. Folks around here is the same. We work on cars and
race 'em. We go to church and don't go to church and work
hard. White and black folks pretty much mixed and was all
the same. I don't know as how anybody said it was so wrong.

MILDRED. I'm part Indian too. And from Africa, I guess.

Don't know much about Africa but I guess I'm from there.
My name is Mildred Jeter.

RICHARD. Oh. Yeah. Sorry. My name is Richard Loving.
What was I saying?

MILDRED. How 'bout you take my hand while you think
about it.

(RICHARD smiles, and they join hands.)

RICHARD. I guess we was all just hanging together more
than anything else when I met her. I think she was eleven
first time. And I was seventeen.

MILDRED. I thought he was arrogant. But really he just
didn't say much, I think.

RICHARD. I'm not very good with words.

BROTHER.

WELL IN MY HEART YOU ARE MY DARLING
AT MY DOOR YOU'RE WELCOME IN
AT YOUR PLACE I'LL MEET YOU MY DARLING
IF YOUR HEART I COULD ONLY WIN

*(MILDRED has bowed her head and is now wearing gold
rimmed glasses. She is older. RICHARD has let go of her
hand and turned his back.)*

MILDRED. I lost him too soon. Eight years after the Supreme
Court and all that fuss. A drunk driver slammed into us on
the road and I lost my eye. I think right before it happened
he leaned over to protect me and that's what saved me but I
can't be sure. It's what he would do, though. I miss him so
hard. I think of him every day.

BROTHER.

WELL IN THE NIGHT I'M DREAMING OF YOU
IN THE DAY I FIND NO REST
JUST THE THOUGHT OF YOU MY DARLING
SENDS ACHING PAINS UNTO MY BREAST

(BROTHER stays onstage strumming the tune through the following.)

MILDRED. You know, all we wanted was to be left alone to live our life. That's all it was. I think all this fuss is wrong because we just wanted to live, you know?

(MILDRED exits one side as the NARRATOR enters from the other. This can be a man or woman, professionally dressed, who will act as a narrator and step in for smaller parts and can even double as COHEN. BROTHER stops strumming.)

NARRATOR. It was the law in twenty-four states in 1959 that a black person and a white person could not be married. Marriage between people of different race is termed "miscegenation." Usually it comes with a fine and maybe a term in prison. I think technically, though, if I understand the sheriff who arrested the Lovings, they were guilty of "illegal cohabitation." I think there was also the Virginia Racial Integrity Act of 1924 that kicked in here. Basically, the Racial Integrity Act required that a racial description of every person be recorded at birth. There were two classifications: white and colored—"colored" included African, American Indian and pretty much everything else, I guess—Chinese, Japanese, Hawaiian, Eskimo. It defined race by the "one drop rule." One drop of "colored" blood and you were "colored." The law criminalized all marriages

between white persons and non-white persons. It also talked about sterilizing people for being feeble minded, epileptic, or criminal. Women who were in jail were ordered to be sterilized so they couldn't have any "faulty" children who would "pollute" society when they grew up. Most of the women in jail in Virginia were African-American so you get the idea. And the Supreme Court had upheld the constitutionality of the law in 1927.

BROTHER. Mildred Jeter, that's my little sister. We all hill people. Don't know any black white red. Everybody just does things together and we also do some drinking. Reckon that's bad for you but your buddies is your buddies and you don't have much choice in the matter if you see what I am saying. Folk just naturally tries to get along. We sing together and play together ... work on cars together. Me, Richard Loving, some others, we have this car and we race it and it is souped up like so it'll go BAM, zero to a hundred, quick as lightning. And we won some good money racing that car. Anyhow, like I said, we also do a lot of singing. Richard Loving, he calls it hillbilly music and I reckon it is. Don't know any other. It ain't "black" music, whatever that is. It's Virginia ballad music and that's what we all share. And anight 'cause we didn't have no TV, we just played and sang and danced and drank. Not in that order. That's where they met, I reckon. Richard come over to work on the car and later we bring out some beers and guitars and—Richard he don't dance usual but that night he danced with my little sister.

(BROTHER gives a rebel yell and grabs his guitar.

RICHARD and MILDRED dance.)

(#2: "Ol' Dan Tucker")

BROTHER (*cont'd*).

OL DAN TUCKER WAS A FINE OL' MAN
 WASHT HIS FACE IN A FRYIN' PAN
 COMBED HIS HAIR WITH A WAGON WHEEL
 AND DIED WITH A TOOTHACHE IN HIS HEEL
 NOW GIT ON YER WAY, OL' DAN TUCKER
 HE'S TOO LATE TO STAY FOR SUPPER
 SUPPER'S OVER BREAKFAST COOKIN'
 OL'S DAN TUCKER JUST STANDS THERE LOOKIN'

MILDRED. How come you dance so bad?

RICHARD. Dunno.

MILDRED. Nobody learnt you?

RICHARD. No.

MILDRED. I'll be the man and you follow—

(MILDRED grabs hold of RICHARD, and they dance around clumsily.)

BROTHER.

OL' DAN TUCKER WENT TO TOWN
 RIDIN' A BILLYGOAT LEADIN' A HOUND
 THE HOUND BIT THE GOAT AND THE GOAT
 KICKED HOOF
 AND BUCKED DAN TUCKER UP ON MY ROOF
 SO GIT ON YOUR WAY OL' DAN TUCKER
 HE'S TOO LATE TO STAY FOR SUPPER
 SUPPER'S OVER BREAKFAST COOKIN'
 OL' DAN TUCKER STANDS THERE LOOKIN'

(RICHARD has accidentally stepped on MILDRED's foot. She is in pain but tries not to show it.)

RICHARD. Oh. Man. I'm—

MILDRED. It's OK.

RICHARD. I'm—

MILDRED (*taking him again*). Here we go—

BROTHER.

OL' DAN TUCKER HE WENT TO FRANCE
TO TEACH THE GIRLIES HOW TO DANCE
WITH A DO-SEE-DO AND A DO-SEE-DEE
AND HE KNOW'S WHAT THEY MEAN
WHEN THEY SAY "OUI OUI"

(Now they are more in sync, MILDRED whirling him around, RICHARD concentrating.)

BROTHER (*cont'd*).

NOW GIT ON YOUR WAY OL' DAN TUCKER
HE'S TOO LATE TO STAY FOR SUPPER
SUPPER'S OVER BREAKFAST COOKIN'
OL' DAN TUCKER JUST STANDS THERE LOOKIN'

(They stand there, winded. She leans on him to examine her foot.)

RICHARD. You want to go out with me?

MILDRED (*standing straight, studying his face*). Can I ask you something?

RICHARD. Yeah.

MILDRED. How come you don't laugh?

RICHARD. You don't laugh.

MILDRED. I laugh. HA! See?

RICHARD. That ain't a laugh.

MILDRED. What's a laugh?

RICHARD. HEE HA! That's a laugh.

MILDRED. That ain't a laugh. That's about the ugliest sound I ever heard.

RICHARD. That's my laugh.

MILDRED. Reckon it's a good thing, then.

RICHARD. What?

MILDRED. That you don't laugh—

(RICHARD chases her around good-naturedly)

BROTHER.

SO GIT ON YOUR WAY OL' DAN TUCKER
WAY TOO LATE TO STAY FOR SUPPER
SUPPER'S OVER BREAKFAST COOKIN'
OL' DAN TUCKER JUST STANDS THERE LOOKIN'

(RICHARD catches her. They pause, unsure what is going to happen next)

BROTHER *(cont'd)*.

OL' DAN TUCKER JUST STANDS THERE LOOKIN'

(BROTHER watches them, strumming.)

BROTHER *(cont'd)*. Anybody want another beer?

(They continue to hold each other. BROTHER strums his guitar, a slow song. They start to sway to the music.)

(#3: “Girl from the Low Country”)

BROTHER *(cont'd)*.

SHE IS A GIRL FROM THE LOW COUNTRY
HE IS A MISTER OF HIGH DEGREE
AND SHE LOVES THIS MISTER SO TENDERLY
SING SORROW SING SORROW
AND SHE SLEEPS IN THE VALLEY WHERE THE
WILD FLOWERS NOD

NOBODY KNOWS SHE LOVES HIM
SAVE HERSELF
AND GOD

(MILDRED swats BROTHER, who laughs. RICHARD, abashed, exits.)

MILDRED. *(to BROTHER, really angry)*. Why you got to ruin stuff?

BROTHER. What? What I do?

MILDRED. I hate you sometimes!

(MILDRED exits. BROTHER smiles.)

BROTHER. And so somehow they was always together them two. Never apart. And it's not like they spoke great guns. She'd be up on the porch. He'd come up and sit next to her. And if the chair was far away he'd pull it closer. And if there was no chair he'd sit on the floor. And then they wouldn't say nothing.

(MILDRED enters and sits. RICHARD comes up and sits at her feet.)

MILDRED. That floor is dirty.

RICHARD. It's OK. So is my jeans. Do you want to get married?

MILDRED. OK. Do you have money?

RICHARD. No. Do you?

MILDRED. No.

NARRATOR. The United States of America is just about the only country in the world to ever have laws against interracial marriage. Spain had one for its colonies in South America to stop Europeans from marrying Indians but they lifted that in 1514. France had one when they were

colonizing Haiti but that went away when Haiti became independent in 1800. Other than Australia and South Africa, nobody else had a ban on interracial marriages by World War II but America.

BROTHER. OK. First race. I hear “start your engines” and the whistle and at first the car won’t crank. I’m telling you I think, “This junk heap ain’t gonna run and she ain’t gonna race”—and I crank and I crank and I look over at Richard who’s by at the pit stop and he’s stomping away at his foot—like he’s one of them horses that can count by stomping his leg—you know?

MILDRED. Get to the point.

BROTHER. That is the point! He was telling me press down on the gas. “Give her more gas!” So I press down and turn her over and BAAAROOM! Like a lion has waked up under the hood there. A freaking lion BAAAAROOOOM!

RICHARD (*trying to conceal how pleased with himself he is*). Yeah. We got some pull from her.

BROTHER. Some pull?! Brother! Some pull?! BZAM! Rocket! Round the curb on two wheels shrieking like tornado—eight thousand pounds of dust, that’s what I made every other blessed car eat—eight thousand pounds of my dust!

MILDRED. That mean you won?

RICHARD. We won.

BROTHER. Won! We stomped! We massacred! We demolitionolished!

MILDRED. That ain’t a word.

RICHARD. Is now.

BROTHER. Let me tell it. Let me tell it. Now the flag goes up for race two—and this is the main purse race, t’other is just a test round—“get ready”—and I vroom

her once more just to see if she's got more roar and GEEEEROOOOOMBAROOOM! I'm telling you heads is turning and people is covering their ears and ladies is fainting—

MILDRED. Ain't no ladies at a car race.

RICHARD. My auntie.

MILDRED. She ain't no lady.

RICHARD. She bet against us.

BROTHER. You gonna let me tell it?

MILDRED (*pleased with it all but trying not to show it*).

Long as you don't take till Saturday.

BROTHER. So holy heewack! The flag comes down and I put her in drive and nothing—I mean like stillness—I mean like I am dead in the water, it seems like. I am screaming to myself holy—

MILDRED. Don't cuss.

BROTHER. Everybody's screeching off ahead but I'm looking at Richard and he's pulling with his arm and so I pull the choke and—BAM! Bat out of— (*Sees MILDRED's admonishing look.*) I mean that car ain't a rocket now! She's a comet! And I am blowing past everybody! Cars tumble by like meteors, one two three four—

MILDRED. How much you win?

BROTHER. I blow through the finish and there ain't no air around my car. It's smoke and dirt thick as chocolate mud pie and twice as tasty—

RICHARD. Five hundred.

BROTHER. The man at the finish he forgets to wave the flag he's so dumbfound like and his cigar drops from his mouth onto the ground and then—

MILDRED. How much you spend?

RICHARD. Six hundred.

BROTHER. That ain't the point. That ain't the point! We so souped up ain't nobody gonna be able to touch us! We got the goods! We are gonna clean up royal—This man is a freaking magician!

MILDRED (*to RICHARD, pleased but sassy*). Do me a magic trick.

RICHARD (*holds out his hand*). Touch the hand—

BROTHER. We gonna take 'em all on and race and race and retire—

MILDRED. Gonna turn me into a frog?

RICHARD. Touch.

BROTHER. Oh I'm worked up! I am worked up!

(After a beat, MILDRED takes RICHARD's hand. He grabs it and pulls her into him, embracing her.)

BROTHER. Hot—darn, man! Hot darn! I—need my guitar!

(BROTHER goes off. MILDRED pulls away a second.)

MILDRED. You call that magic?

RICHARD. Yeah.

BROTHER (*off*). Hot darn!

MILDRED. This magic. (*Kisses RICHARD.*)